



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH  
*1102 SE Quince Street • PO Box 47990  
Olympia, Washington 98504-7990*

May 2, 2003

Mr. Eric Johnson, Chair  
Lewis County Board of Health  
351 N.W. North Street  
Chehalis, Washington 98532

Dear Chairman:

Thank you and the other members of your board of health for allowing Don Sloma and me to come before you recently to learn more about your priority areas of concern. I really enjoyed the opportunity you afforded us for a freewheeling and very constructive discussion.

We were impressed by the attention your board has devoted to balancing the public's desire for essential services with their sense of being overwhelmed by tax burdens. It was instructive to hear that increasing demand for services and shrinking revenue is a general problem for you; not unique to public health. I admire your willingness to confront the issue directly by seeking a public dialogue, both locally and with the state, about raising new revenue or reducing expectations and mandates. It was particularly useful to receive your specific suggestions for mandates the state Board might reconsider, such as the current operations and maintenance requirements for on-site sewage systems and our consideration of applying new federal standards for arsenic in drinking water to small water systems. Balancing the costs and public health benefits of these requirements against others will be among the Board's tasks in the coming year.

It was also useful for you to point out that our efforts to control West Nile Virus may require some "out of the box" thinking to deal with problems like eliminating tire piles and abating riverbed breeding grounds. These are certainly issues worth passing on to our colleagues, especially because they may require strategies not normally employed in public health protection.

Our discussion of personal health and medical issues in your county was equally stimulating. Your focus and concern about substance abuse as a major public health problem was well taken. The state Board has long regarded substance abuse in public health terms. Our research has led us to agree with the sentiment some of you expressed in our meeting that investments in treatment are among the most cost effective public health investments we can make. The research shows that such investments pay dividends not only for affected individuals, their families and communities, but also for medical care systems who will see fewer medical bills among clean and sober patients, and for state and local government as jail and prison systems see fewer drug "encouraged" offenses. We do not understand why government allows waiting lists

to develop for drug or alcohol treatment. From a public health perspective, we believe it should be near the very top of our funding priorities.

Finally your struggle to mitigate the erosion in access to primary, preventive and emergency medical care in Lewis County was very helpful for us to hear. We are heartened by your efforts to engage the private sector in expanding dental care through the ABCD program, and your ongoing efforts to relieve your local hospital's emergency room of the burden to treat primary care preventable cases. We agree that current public subsidies of medical care for the poor, the elderly and the disabled are creating unbearable strain, especially on fragile rural medical care systems like yours. We will continue to make that point to those controlling these things both here and, more significantly, in the other Washington. Please let us know if you think of anything more we can do to help on this.

Our meeting with your board was very helpful to our ongoing efforts to learn more about community perspectives on public health issues. As I mentioned during our discussion, we intend to use the information we receive from you and other Boards of Health in our 2004 State Health Report. By law, the state Board must produce this report biennially, together with recommendations for state health priorities for the ensuing biennium. You may see the 2002 State Health Report at <http://www.doh.wa.gov/sboh/Pubs/2002SHR.pdf>

If you would like to provide additional information, other community perspectives or other suggestions for statewide health priorities, please feel free to call or write. We will be accepting additional input from local boards of health for the state health report until September 30, 2003. We are open to hearing from you about emerging issues at any time.

If you have any further questions or requests, please call the Board office at (360) 236-4110 and one of our staff would be happy to assist you in anyway possible.

Again, thank you for allowing us some time with you in your busy schedules.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Linda Lake", with a stylized, flowing script.

Linda Lake, Chair  
Washington State Board of Health

cc: Lewis County Board of Health Members  
Washington State Board of Health Members  
Don Sloma, Washington State Board of Health